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United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

June 12, 1998

Mr. Alvin Finkelstein
2684 W St #6J
Brooklyn, New York 11223

Dear Mr. Finkelstein:

Thank you for writing to me about the pending tobacco legislation. This legislation has gained significant attention over the past several months, and for good reason. First, more than 3000 children take up smoking each day, and second this addictive practice is the leading preventable cause of death in the United States. Use of tobacco products costs taxpayers (smokers and non-smokers alike) hundreds of millions of dollars through health insurance payments, Medicaid and Medicare outlays and lost productivity. Medicare alone will spend an estimated $800 billion over the next 20 years caring for our senior citizens with smoking-related illnesses.

Tobacco is a major risk factor for heart disease, stroke, chronic bronchitis, emphysema, and cancer of the lung (killing over 139,000 people a year in the U.S.), throat, mouth, esophagus, bladder, and pancreas. Cigarette smoking is responsible for approximately 20 percent of all heart disease deaths and 30 percent of all cancer deaths, including more than 80 percent of lung cancer deaths. Epidemiologists in Britain and the United States now estimate that half of all lifetime smokers will die from a smoking-related illness.

Cigarette use has declined dramatically since 1964, when the first Surgeon General's report on smoking appeared. The percentage of adults who smoke has fallen from 42.4 percent in 1965 to under 25.7 percent today. However, recent surveys indicate that the percentage of smokers among high school students is increasing. An estimated one million youngsters start smoking each year, at a rate of almost 3,000 a day. The Center for Disease Control estimated that in 1993 the direct medical costs for treating smoking-related illnesses totaled $50 billion.

As a consequence of the health problems brought about by smoking, numerous measures have been put forward in Congress in an attempt to reduce smoking among younger Americans, and to minimize the public health impact of tobacco use. The goals of the legislation are: (1) to limit advertising tobacco products--especially those ads that target minors; (2) attempt to eliminate access by children to tobacco products; (3) provide significant funds for a national anti-tobacco public education campaign (to include prescribing new warning labels and standards for packaging); and (4) create a fund to help off-set the public

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health costs of treating tobacco-related illnesses.

The key issue for Congress, as it weighs these proposals, is the balance between the rights of those who choose to use tobacco and the public and economic benefits of achieving reductions in the use of tobacco products, especially by our children. I am sensitive to the concerns of all who write to me on this subject, and I will be certain to keep your views in mind as we debate the tobacco legislation in the Senate.

Sincerely,

Alfonse D'Amato
United States Senator

AMD:jd

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